areas, the inter-distance is at least 5 kms from the stations/halts on either side. While calculating financial justification, the population of the surrounding villages is also taken into consideration.

The halt can also be opened even if it infringes the minimum distance limitation of 5 kms from the stations/halts on either side, if it is found to be remunerative and there is need for this on passenger amenity grounds. Even in case of loss, a halt can be sanctioned if the loss is less than Rs. 10,000 per annum;

When the conditions stipulated above are not fulfilled, a halt may be opened on passenger amenity ground after approval from the competent authority.

Demands of NFIR for Rail Travellers

1163. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) has demanded steps to improve safety and for quality services to the travelling public;

(b) if so, the details of their demands; and

(c) the steps taken for early reconditioning of distressed bridges and make available the required staff, for maintenance and operation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) held the 23rd National Convention at Visakhapatnam from 19th to 21st August, 2002, wherein, *inter-alia,* they traced out various factors like inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor quality of equipment and materials, poor maintenance and unsatisfactory working conditions of staff belonging to safety categories etc. and suggested corrective steps needed to remove these shortcomings, so that there is an improvement in safety and quality of services to the travelling public.

(c) All the distressed bridges on Indian Railways are sanctioned for rehabilitation/rebuilding on priority. Out of 527 distressed bridges, as on 1.4.2002, 341 are targeted to be rehabilitated during 2002-2003. An amount of Rs. 410 crores was spent for rebuilding/strengthening of 3400 bridges including 617 distressed bridges during the 9th Plan Period. Rs. 1530 crores has been earmarked for rehabilitation/rebuilding of bridges out of Special Railway Safety Fund in the next 5 to 6 years. In addition, bridges are also sanctioned for

rehabilitation/rebuilding every year chargeable to Railway Annual Works Programme. A sum of Rs. 209 crores (Rs. 143 crores out of Special Railway Safety Fund and Rs. 66 crores out of Depreciation Reserve Fund) has been allotted for rehabilitation/rebuilding of bridges during the year 2002-2003. Necessary staff for maintenance and operation is available.

Vacancies of Loco Staff in SER

1164. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that over 1250 posts of loco running staff are vacant in South Eastern Railway;

(b) whether the existing staff is required to put extra hours of work, leading to fatigue, bearing an adverse impact on the safety of passengers; and

(c) if so, the steps taken to improve the safety of passengers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) No, Sir. As on 1.11.2002 there were 435 vacancies in the posts of loco running staff on South Eastern Railway. This amounts to 4.21 percent of the cadre. The leave reserve provided in the Drivers' category is 30% which is more than sufficient to take care of these 4.21 percent vacancies in this cadre.

(b) and (c) No, Sir. However, norms provide for working by the crew beyond the limits prescribed in exceptional exigencies of accidents, floods, agitations, equipment failures, etc., only.

Rail Food-over Bridge at Warangal

1165. SHRIMATI N. P. DURGA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to construct a second railway booking counter and a foot-over bridge at Warangal Railway Station in Andhra Pradesh; and

(b) if so, the allocation made therefor and by when the work would be taken up and completed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) Yes, Sir.

Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.